

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

756
761
753
attention is devoted to preparing for the elaborate mortuary rites rather than towards seeking any kind of so-called "supernatural" causation. In all other cases, except where caused by an obvious wound, sickness and death are ascribed to supernatural causes, chief among which are some act of malignant magic (though this is much rarer in the Small Islands than in most other parts of Malekula), or the fact that the sick man has in some way offended the ghost of a departed kinsman or else has been wantonly attacked out of sheer blind revenge by the ghost of some man who has been killed in battle and therefore roams the world in search of victims.

In all such cases a diviner is needed to diagnose the cause, that is to say to discover what sorcerer or ghost is responsible for the sick man's condition. If a sorcerer, the only cure is to persuade him by threats or payment to remove by counter-magic the sickness that he has caused. If a ghost, it must first be discovered what individual ghost it is. For this purpose a practitioner (*maru man*) is called in who, looking at the sick man, sings to himself a special song and by this means finds out what ghost has entered into him. Then he tells the patient who the ghost is.

(a) *Ghost of a kinsman.*

• 755
775
In almost all cases, such an initial diagnosis will point to the fact that the ghost (*ta-mat*) in question is that of a departed relative¹ offended at the omission of some ritual act or at the commission of some accidental slight. In this case the practitioner tells the patient whose ghost it is, and says, "I think you must have done him some wrong, to cause him to enter into you in this way." The sick man then thinks it over, and remembers something or other that he has done that must have offended this particular ghost. The practitioner then tells the son or brother of the sick man to bring a leafy branch of the kind called *rumbu log-log*, and when brought places it in the sick man's right hand to hold. When the sick man has held it for a little time, the child or brother takes the branch from him and places it on the grave of the offended ghost, and addresses him, saying, "You have gone into this man; come out from him now. You have made him sick; if you leave him now he will recover." Then he lays a money-mat (*mangau*) on the grave and ties a pig to it as an offering. The size of the pig depends on the importance of the ghost and on the gravity of the disease. If the sick man gets well, the pig is subsequently removed. If he remains sick, the pig is left there until the patient either gets well or dies.

(b) *Ghost of one slain in battle.*

It is, however, possible that the diagnosis points to the fact that the ghost that has entered in is that of a man who has died a violent death.

¹ This may be from either side of his family. Instances given include the brother, father, father's father and mother's brother.

MAGIC

631

Ghosts of this kind are known by a special name, *ta-mat oamp*, or "fiery ghost," from their habit of wandering about the bush looking at night like a red will-o'-the-wisp. Such ghosts may act in one of two ways. On the one hand they may enter into the body of a kinsman, just like any ordinary ghost, in order to punish him for some wrong he may have committed. On the other hand, a ghost of this type, especially if his body was carried off by the enemy and eaten and he therefore received no proper burial or mortuary rites and thus cannot reach the land of the dead, will wander about the bush seeking whom he may destroy, and, seeing some stranger whom he "does not know," will enter into him as an enemy and cause sickness or death. If his relatives had succeeded in bringing home his body and giving it a proper grave, the procedure in case of sickness caused by his ghost is the same as for that caused by the ghost of a man who has died an ordinary death. But if he was taken by the enemy and eaten and so has no grave, the relatives of the sick man whom he has maliciously entered take a branch of the *rumbu log-log* to the place where he was killed and, making there a small fire, roast upon it a special kind of yam called *la-las*.¹ This yam is red and, like the will-o'-the-wisp, symbolises violent death. (My informant Ma-taru, once a Mission teacher, compared it with the wine of the Sacrament which by its redness signifies the blood of Christ.) Then they address the ghost of the slain, just as an ordinary ghost is addressed, and holding a communion feast over the grave, leave a portion of the yams as an offering to it.

My informant Ma-taru assured me that the cure was infallible. The only trouble, he said, was that sometimes the practitioner is mistaken in his diagnosis, and, the offerings having been made to the wrong ghost, naturally the man dies.

(c) *A man's sickness may also be caused by an offence committed by his wife.*

Ma-taru's own father, Ter-ter-mal, was a *ta-mat oamp*, having been slain during the course of a quarrel between two Tolamp Lodges. The warring factions being so closely related, his body had been recovered and given decent burial. The following instance shows how a ghost of this type may function just like any ordinary ancestral ghost visiting sickness on his descendant for some fault committed, and shows also how a man may suffer not only for his own fault but also for that of his wife. Ma-taru used to suffer from some periodical illness every year. One day he spoke to a friend on the mainland, who looked at him and said, "I see. The spirit of your father Ter-ter-mal is doing this. Your wife has done something that has displeased him. You had better make her give you a pig and a piece of kava root and a *rumbu log-log* branch and go and put them on his grave, and you will recover." He did so, and got well. His pigs also used to be constantly dying, so on the advice of this same main-

¹ Atchin letsi-lets.

lander he placed these three types of offering on his father's grave, and thenceforth they prospered.¹

(2) CURES DUE TO REMOVAL OF EVIL INFLUENCE
BY OTHER MEANS

If these methods fail, then the same or some other practitioner is called in to deal more specifically with the sick man's trouble by means of further magical acts, which include the administration of potions made by infusing leaves in hot water, or hot fomentations,² blood-letting or massage. In all cases, as is quite evident in the case of blood-letting, the purpose of these acts appears to be to remove the evil influence injected by the offended ghost. In the case of massage the evil influence is often extracted by the magician in the shape of some material object such as a stone or a snake. These symbols, both more or less world-wide in therapeutic magic, are highly significant. The stone often appears in the dream-language of Europeans to represent a hard core in the psyche causing sickness which can only be cured by its removal by means of psycho-therapeutic treatment.

The snake also is a well-known psychological symbol. In religious terminology it frequently represents the devil which has to be exorcised, or quite literally "driven out." In this case the driving out is spiritually conceived, whereas the native magician claims actually to remove the object from the patient's body. How far the native practitioner who, we can but conclude, himself produces these objects in concrete form, is aware of what they mean is a matter that has never, so far as I know, been investigated, since the attitude of investigators has been up to the present that these symbols are of no importance and that the whole performance is designed simply to trick the gullible patient. So far as the patient is concerned, however, we may assume that he fully believes that the object in question was a manifestation of the ghostly influence that had entered into him, and its removal in apparently concrete form is doubtless in many cases sufficient to perform a cure.

¹ An experience of my own shows, not only how unwittingly a man may offend a ghost, but also how easy it is even for a white man to get caught up in this belief. I had taken one morning, in excellent light, a photograph of the grave of an old man named Melteg-rush, here reproduced in Plate XXI. That afternoon, while I was working with my informant, I was seized with an attack of fever. He immediately said, "I knew that was coming. Didn't you see a small bird called *na-higho* with a white breast and blue tail sitting on a branch and screaming at you this morning while you were taking that photo? That was Melteg-rush's ghost, and he has entered into you and given you fever." That night, in high fever, I found myself thinking what a fool I had been to have taken the photograph in such bad light, as it would only result in wasting a plate. Next morning I realised the reason of my self-reproaches. I must be half-believing in my informant's reasoning. The test would be whether the exposure was taken in bad light or good. The photograph turned out to be perfectly good.

² Similar to these used after incision (see pp. 509 ff.).